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Miami Ultimate CEO Awards

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Staff South Florida Business Journal

The South Florida Business Journal is pleased to announce the 2015 Miami Ultimate CEO Awards honorees.

The awards, which highlight Miami-Dade County's top executives for their expertise, leadership and community involvement, are backed by presenting sponsor Comcast Business and corporate sponsors AvMed and FirstBank Florida.

The Miami-Dade honorees will be celebrated alongside top executives from Broward and Palm Beach counties at the 2015 Ultimate CEO Awards on Sept. 17 at the Fort Lauderdale Marriott Harbor Beach Resort & Spa.

The Palm Beach honorees were announced in a special awards section included in our March 27 issue, and the Broward honorees will be revealed in our Aug. 21 print edition.

Congratulations to this year's class of Miami Ultimate CEOs.

Susan Amat

CEO, Venture Hive

1010 N.E. Second Ave., Miami 3313

(305) 735-1274

susan@venturehive.com

In many ways, Susan Amat personifies the South Florida startup enterprise. She launched and leads Miami's Venture Hive, an entrepreneurship education company that provides content and programs to create entrepreneurship ecosystems in the U.S. and emerging markets. She was the creator and executive director of The Launch Pad at the University of Miami, a national model in entrepreneurship education, which has been replicated nationwide.

Amat spent more than a decade in the entertainment industry, developing, producing and/or directing a startup national TV show, an international CD-ROM magazine, an independent record label, and serving as marketing and strategic consultant to firms in health care and retail.

Along the way, she's been called a "Champion of Change" for entrepreneurial mentoring by the White House, earned the inaugural Emerging Leader Award from the Florida International University Center for Leadership, and was awarded Hispanic Unity's Entrepreneur Catalyst Award.

Amat sees the importance of future generations of tech leaders. She chairs Miami-Dade County Public Schools' newly formed STEM Board, which works with educators and the business community to support high-school programs focusing on information technology, health sciences and engineering. She also chairs Startup Florida and the Startup America Partnership.

Despite all these accolades, Amat's still sees herself as "a high-school dropout on a mission to change how teachers educate and support kids with big ideas," she has said. "When there is no 'right' answer, developing gut instincts in children and adults is a challenge that has not been a focus in entrepreneurship education."

Education

Ph.D. in strategic entrepreneurship; M.B.A. in marketing, management and computer information systems; B.A. in music media and industry/psychology, University of Miami

Career

Lecturer, marketing and management, University of Miami

Strategy and branding consultant, Iron Will Consulting

Founder and director, Institute for Health Innovation

Marketing and strategy consultant, Locatel

Founder and director, Uprising Multimedia

Director of multimedia, Revelation Records

Personal Note

Amat enjoys being with family, writing, reading, going to the beach or walking around the Gables. "Talking with rational people with big ideas recharges me," she says.

Luis E. Capo

CEO, El Dorado Furniture

4200 N.W. 167th St., Miami 33054

(305) 624-9700

luis@eldoradofurniture.com

Luis E. Capo personifies the American success story. His formal education ended in the sixth grade in Cuba, and his job history includes working in his father's small furniture shop on

the island, where he learned carpentry, upholstery, making furniture with iron and Formica, negotiating with vendors and working with customers.

When he arrived in the U.S., his first job was in a furniture factory making \$1.35 an hour. He soon learned how to run a company by reading business books, and taking courses and seminars in business. After he opened El Dorado Furniture, he worked as a deliveryman, salesman, warehouse manager and customer care agent.

Along the way, he also learned what it meant to be an effective leader. He built his organization around values and culture, realizing that those traits are timeless and unaffected by trends or the size of the business. They are communicated constantly throughout the organization.

"This has been one of my primary objectives as CEO," Capo says. "My relationship with my team, which I consider as part of my family, is founded on mutual trust and respect. They make me, and our company, the best we can with their passion, experience and their clear understanding of the goals, values and culture of El Dorado Furniture."

The mark of a true leader, he says, is being someone who leads by motivation, by listening, by welcoming feedback and delivering clear goals so everyone is rowing in the same direction," he says.

These traits he learned from his father, Manolo Capo, an outstanding leader and "a remarkable teacher who taught me not to be afraid, and that with hard work, honesty and perseverance, the sky is the limit."

Personal Note

"My employees and colleagues might be surprised to know that the same confident person who today conducts sales seminars and motivational workshops for his employees and other organizations did not know how to talk to his first customer," he says. "I remember that I panicked and froze. I was terrified and very shy."

Larry Carrino

CEO, Brustman Carrino Public Relations

4500 Biscayne Blvd., No. 360, Miami 33137

(305) 573-0658

larry@brustmancarrinopr.com

Larry Carrino is the quintessential mailroom-to-boardroom executive. Just two years out of high school, he joined a successful public relations firm, Susan Brustman & Associates PR, in an entry-level post in February 1995. By 2011, he was named president and owner of the renamed culinary, hotel and arts-related PR and marketing firm, Brustman Carrino Public Relations.

In between, he learned what it takes to run a successful marketing firm: presence under pressure, humor amid stress, and expecting professionalism and personal leadership while encouraging levity in the face of deadlines.

“My industry is a stressful one, and deadlines are a daily presence. This can make things tense, so from the top down, I try to maintain a sense of levity and humor,” he says. “I do not micromanage. I encourage everyone to be a leader in their own projects while knowing that we are all a team here.”

Throughout it all, Carrino fosters esprit de corps among his people. Where other PR firms – and many businesses – seek a competitive drive among their people, he’d prefer a team mentality. This is especially true for those rising in the ranks.

“They work hard and don’t embrace the dramas and craziness that can come with a job in public relations and marketing. They also look out for me, knowing my shortcomings and shoring me up in those departments. We all have each other’s back here,” he says. “I have not forgotten what it was like to be an employee or just making it. I remind myself regularly how lucky I am to be where I am and that, without Susan’s support and mentorship, it wouldn’t have happened.”

Education

Bachelor’s degree in English, Florida International University

Career

Joined Susan Brustman & Associates PR in 1995; named president and owner in 2011.

Personal Note

“I am fiercely passionate about cinema,” he says. “My dream job would be to teach film studies on the university level.”

John Kanas

Chairman, President and CEO, BankUnited

www.bankunited.com

14817 Oak Lane, Miami Lakes 33016

(305) 817-8117

John Kanas has enjoyed a storied 40-year career in the banking industry. From overseeing the sale of the nation’s 16th-largest bank to Capital One for more than \$14 billion, to leading a consortium of private equity firms in the purchase of BankUnited from the FDIC in a history-making transaction, he has been part banker, part entrepreneur.

Since that time, he has led the bank’s transformation from a small thrift to a public company (in 2009) and the largest commercial bank based in Florida. The native Long Islander also spearheaded its expansion into New York.

The organization has earned the industry's attention. In 2013, BankUnited was named the top publicly owned midsize bank in America by *Bank Director* magazine. *Forbes* named it one of the best banks in America that same year.

Kanas adheres to basic business principles. He spends time with senior management, communicating the company vision and strategy, ensuring everyone is on the same page, he says. He relies on their professionalism, competence and reliability, which "allows me to be my best," he says.

Kanas guides his organization as the example he wants to be – with a strong work ethic and frequent communications. If his career and success reflects that of any leader, Kanas says that would be Abraham Lincoln, "because of his ability to overcome dramatic odds and never gave up."

Education

Undergraduate degree, Southampton College

Graduate work, Long Island University

Career

Worked at and led North Fork Bancorp. and its subsidiaries between 1971 and 2006, when it was sold to Capital One.

Personal Note

"I live on the farm I grew up on, in my grandfather's house," he says.

[James R. Kaufman](#)

CEO, Kaufman Rossin

2699 S. Bayshore Drive, No. 500, Miami 33133

(305) 858-5600

jkaufman@kaufmanrossin.com

[James R. Kaufman](#)'s biography calls the CPA a man whose "visionary leadership" has helped grow the firm he founded into one of the nation's largest accounting firms, with more than 385 members. Given that the firm today is 53 years old, it's safe to say Kaufman has witnessed Miami grow in the process.

Throughout the years, though, Kaufman and co-founder Jay Rossin have embraced a stable ethos of "our people first, and creating a culture that values integrity, social responsibility and joy at work," he says. "This creates strong and caring relationships between staff, clients and partners – and it benefits us all."

Today, a six-person management committee leads Kaufman Rossin. Kaufman, managing partner Blain Heckaman and the four other members collaborate on all decisions.

"Working as a team, we bring different skills and perspectives to the table," he says. "This collaborative leadership is a defining element of Kaufman Rossin's success."

With emotional intelligence, a spirit of continuous learning, and a desire for physical wellness, Kaufman is

able to "perform at a consistently high level." He also pursues the practice of "mindfulness," which helps him

"stay grounded in the present, not dwelling on past issues or worrying about future concerns. Focusing on the people, the environment and the current moment means I give undivided attention and energy when and where it is needed."

Education

Bachelor's degree in accounting, University of Florida

Career

Founded Kaufman Rossin in 1962.

Personal Note

"I am an avid skier, scuba diver, hiker and the self-proclaimed table tennis champion of Coconut Grove," he says.

John W. Kozyak

CEO, Kozyak Tropin & Throckmorton

2525 Ponce de Leon Blvd., 9th floor, Coral Gables 33134

(305) 372-1800

jk@kttlaw.com

As founding partner of Kozyak Tropin & Throckmorton and co-chair of the firm's bankruptcy practice, John W. Kozyak has earned a host of professional accolades.

He has been recognized in every edition of Best Lawyers In America since it was first published in 1983. For the past six years, he has been identified as one of its "Bet-the-Company" litigators in Florida. Chambers USA has ranked him as one of the top bankruptcy lawyers in Florida in its America's Leading Lawyers For Business, and in 2011, he was selected as one of the Top 10 lawyers in Florida by Super Lawyers, and named to *Florida Trends* Legal Elite Hall of Fame.

Along with a shelf of other humanitarian and legal service awards, the firm received the Supreme Court Chief Justice's Law Firm Commendation for providing free legal services, and Kozyak received both the Florida Bar President's Pro Bono Service Award and the Florida Bar's G. Kirk Haas Humanitarian Award.

As a CEO, he is driven by his work ethic – and recognition of the qualities people bring to firm. He surrounds himself with talented people who complement his strengths.

He “thinks big” and doesn’t sweat the small stuff. And he delegates without second-guessing decisions.

Successful executives must “work hard and play hard and be able to turn off the work switch,” he says, “because there is more to life than dollars and awards. At least there better be.”

Education

B.S. in marketing, University of Illinois

J.D., Washington University School of Law

Personal Note

Kozyak climbed Mount Kilimanjaro with his son to celebrate his 50th birthday.

John Kunkel

CEO, 50 Eggs

www.50eggsinc.com

4770 Biscayne Blvd., Suite 1280, Miami 33137

(786) 360-2553

In many ways, John Kunkel is South Florida’s restaurateur. His efforts have touched, launched or sustained a host of successful and innovative restaurants throughout the market.

His award-winning restaurant group includes Khong River House, Patpong Road, Swine Southern Table & Bar, and the original Lime Fresh Mexican Grill on South Beach, which he grew into the Lime Fresh fast-casual concept with 10 South Florida locations and sold to the Ruby Tuesday restaurant group for \$24 million. His Yardbird Southern Table & Bar is slated to open on Las Vegas’ iconic restaurant row.

As the head of what *Restaurant Hospitality* magazine calls one of the “coolest multi-concept companies in the land,” Kunkel’s success has come from his “unwavering passion and exceptional business acumen,” which have led to “highly successful and ahead-of-the-curve culinary concepts.”

Over two decades, his success has been achieved through business basics. He has stayed true to the concepts, focusing on the quality of food and service. With his team beside him, together they execute and deliver the vision, and drive the focus on shared goals.

“I believe I have found success in the relentless pursuit of excellence,” he says. “Every day we wake up and have to do better than the day before.”

As for the company name, it plays into the characteristics of a successful executive. In the movie "Cool Hand Luke," Paul Newman's character eats 50 eggs after making a bet.

"It symbolizes beating all odds and accomplishing the impossible," he says. "Don't give up and don't allow others to tell you what you can't accomplish."

Personal Note

"At 18, I headed to Thailand in pursuit of martial arts training," he says. "While living in the northern part of the country, I fell in love with the cuisine."

Stephen Owens

President, Swire Properties

www.swireproperties.us

501 Brickell Key Drive, Suite 600, Miami 33131

(305) 371-3877

Stephen Owens has read countless books and heard the words of many successful executives. But when asked about a leader he admires, Owens mentions the Dalai Lama. Intriguing and fascinating, worldly yet quick to approach an event's staff over its dignitaries, he personifies humble leadership.

"He is burdened with terrific responsibility and challenges against some immeasurable odds, yet he remains calm, reflective and maintains a sense of humor," recalls Owens, who has had several audiences with the Dalai Lama. "His writings give great insights into someone who's dealing with stress in a material world, yet has a great way of putting things into perspective. If you're having a particularly bad day, ask yourself: 'How would he deal with this?'"

As a leader – he avoids the title "president" – Owens believes himself equally appreciative of those around him. He empowers his team, listens to their advice and shows interest in their lives. In return, they've been loyal and committed.

"I never thought I was a particularly effective CEO," he admits. "But what I focus on is that it's really, literally all about your staff and team. In order to be successful, you have to be interested in them."

In less than two years, Owens will celebrate 40 years at Swire. Along the way, his teams' projects have transformed Miami, including Brickell Key, the Courvoisier Centre office complex, the Jade, Tequesta Point, Carbonell and ASIA luxury condominiums, the Mandarin Oriental Miami and the coming Brickell City Centre.

His longevity with the company is a reflection of Swire's own history. Seven generations have led the firm – a fact hardly lost on Owens.

"It's been absolutely a pleasure and privilege to be at a 200-year-old company," he says, "The value of that tradition. I've been blessed in that sense."

Education

B.S. in finance, East Carolina University

Advanced courses, Michigan State University, New York University and Columbia University

Personal Note

Owens has climbed Mount Kilimanjaro and to base camp in Nepal, fly fishes "anywhere and everywhere," and is a cancer survivor from 1983.

Deborah Spiegelman

CEO, Miami Children's Museum

980 MacArthur Causeway, Miami 33132

(305) 373-5437

debbie@miamichildrensmuseum.org

In 1992, Deborah Spiegelman arrived at the Miami Children's Museum. In 2000, she was named CEO. Little did anyone know then how far she would take the organization – and the stamp Spiegelman would put on the community along the way.

That included spearheading some \$25 million in fundraising for the 56,500-square-foot facility's 2003 opening on Watson Island. Along the way, Spiegelman also has become a leader in the children's museum space. She was a special adviser to the Delaware Children's Museum, which opened in 2010, and an adviser to the South Korea Ministry of Education for the development of a \$168 million children's campus outside Seoul. She is a past board member to the Association of Children's Museums.

Her passion and success are best reflected in her current organization and how she engages its leadership.

"I have a strong leadership team that manages our day-to-day operations," she says. "[They are] able to recognize and develop talent so that I may focus on the bigger picture and vision for the institution."

Her own philosophies for successful leadership? Be a forward-thinking and confident team builder.

"One should be equipped to create by cultivating an ability to see opportunities for the institution," she says. "Even when making the unpopular decisions, one must be able to lead a team in uncharted territories One needs to understand how teams work and how to get the most out of a group."

Spiegelman knows she can't do her job alone.

"As CEO of a nonprofit, I can call upon my board members whose expertise is relevant," she says. "I also practice yoga and Pilates three times a week, which is essential to establishing

a work-life balance, so that I can enjoy both to the fullest and not be stressed by the work when I am enjoying life.”

Education

B.B.A., University of Miami

Career

Director of Development and Public Relations, The Miami Project to Cure Paralysis, University of Miami

Foundation Associate, Mount Sinai Medical Center

Director of Women’s Division, Manager of Israel Missions Program, Super Sunday Staff Coordinator, Greater Miami Jewish Federation

Personal Note

“I am an avid traveler and now find myself experiencing a new work/life balance that includes hiking and visiting out-of-the-way, interesting museums around the world,” she says.

Past Honorees

2004

- Donna Abood, Abood Wood-Fay Real Estate
- Cesar Alvarez, Greenberg Traurig, PA
- Richard Berkowitz, Berkowitz Dick Pollack & Brant CPA
- Edgardo DeFortuna, Fortune International Realty
- Richard Fain, Royal Caribbean Cruises, Ltd.
- Calixto Garcia-Velez, Citibank Florida
- Allen C. Harper, EWM Realtors
- Brian E. Keeley, Baptist Health South Florida
- Manny Medina, Terremark Worldwide, Inc.
- Jorge Perez, The Related Group of Florida

2005

- Hank Adorno, Adorno & Yoss
- Willy W. Bermello, Bermello, Ajamil & Partners
- Stephen Bittel, Terranova Corporation
- Bob Dickinson, Carnival Cruise Lines
- Jeff Hicks, Crispin, Porter + Bogusky
- Ezra Katz, Aztec Group, Inc.
- Dr. Lisa Krinsky, SFBC International
- Stuart Miller, Lennar Corporation
- Frank Nero, The Beacon Council
- Ramior Ortiz, BankUnited
- Greg Sweinton, Ryder System

2006

- Wayne R. Angstrom, St. Ives US Division
- Antonio Argiz, Morrison, Brown, Argiz & Farra, LLP
- Bowman Brown, Shutts & Bowen
- Joseph L. Caruncho, Preferred Care Partners
- Manuel de Zarraga, Holliday Fenoglio Fowler
- Gilbert Fiorentino, Tiger Direct
- Nelson Gonzalez, Alienware Corp.
- Evangeline Gouletas, Skyline Equities Realty
- Angel Medina, Jr., Regions Bank
- Thomas M. Rozek, Miami Children's Hospital

2007

- Tere Blanca, Cushman & Wakefield of Florida, Inc.
- Lawrence Blum, Rachlin Cohen & Holtz LLP
- Slenda Chan, Atlantic International Group
- George Feldenkreis, Perry Ellis International
- Bernardo Fort-Brescia, Arquitectonica
- Lewis Freeman Lewis Freeman & Partners
- Marvin O'Quinn, Jackson Health System
- Laurinda Spear, Arquitectonica
- Marty, Steinberg, Hunton & Williams, LLP

2008

- Adrienne Arsht, TotalBank
- Bo Boulenger, Baptist Hospital
- Bill Diggs, Miami-Dade Chamber
- Marian Krutulic, Gulliver Schools
- Prieto Prieto, Holland & Knight
- Alex Soto, InSource, Inc.
- Bill Talbert III, Greater Miami CVB
- Mario Trueba, BNY Mellon-Florida
- Bernard Zyscovich, Zyscovich Architects

2009

- R. Marcelo Claire, Brightstar Corp.
- Michael Kasbar, World Fuels Services
- Valentin Lopez, Lopez & Partners, LLC
- Modesto Maidique, Florida International University
- Earl Powell, Trivest Partners
- Craig Robins, Dacra Development
- Rachel Sapoznik, Sapoznik Insurance
- Dr. Jams Schwade, CyberKnife Center of Miami
- Paula Stebbins, World Fuels Services
- Charles Stiefel, Stiefel Laboratories

2010

- Michael Adler, The Adler Group
- Ricky Arriola, Inktel Direct Corp.
- Philip Frost, OPKO Health
- Benjamin Leon, III, Leon Medical Centers
- Albert Lopez, BDO
- Lydia Muniz, Big Brothers Big Sisters of Greater Miami
- Eduardo Padron, Miami-Dade College
- Penny Shaffer, Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Florida
- Rom Shuffield, Esslinger-Wooten-Maxwell Realtors (EWM)
- John C. Sumberg, Bilzin Sumberg, Attorneys at Law

2011

- Don Browne, Telemundo Communications Group
- Kelly Ann Cartwright, Holland & Knight
- Harvey R. Chaplin, Southern Wine & Spirits of America, Inc.
- David Clarke, BGT Partners
- Tom Cornish, Seitlin Insurance & Advisory Services
- Nerendra Kini, Miami Childrens Hospital
- Barbara Liberatore Black, CresaPartners
- Mario Murgado, Brickell Motors a d/b/a of Miami Automotive Retail
- Donna Shalala, University of Miami
- Kevin Sheehan, Norwegian Cruise Line

2012

- Alberto Carvalho, Miami-Dade Public Schools Superintendent
- Tibor Hollo, Florida East Coast Realty, Inc.
- Jose Ramon Mas, MasTec, Inc
- Harve A. Mogul, United Way
- Jose L. Prendes, PureFormulas.com
- Jorge Rossell, TotalBank
- Steven D. Sonenreich, Mount Sinai Medial Center
- Warren Henry Zinn, Warren Henry Automotive Group

2013

- Christine Barney, rbb Public Relation
- Juan Diego Calle, Straat Investments.CO
- Mayi de la Vega, Sotheby's International Realty
- Emilio Estefan, Estefan Enterprises
- Jeffrey Freimark, Miami Jewish Health Systems
- Jorge Gonzalez, City National Bank of Florida
- Jeremy Larkin, NAI Miami
- Peter Pruitt, Deloitte
- Monty Trainer, Coconut Grove Arts Festival

2014

- Paul R. Ahrs, Camillus House
- Albert Dosal, Dosal Capital

- Sanford "Sandy" Horwitz, Goldstein Schechter Koch
- Edward Joyce, Northern Trust Bank
- Carlos Migoya, Jackson Health System
- Abe Ng, Sushi Maki
- Alberto Santalo, CareCloud
- Matthew Whitman, Lazenby Whitman Family Development